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Unwanted sex with third parties in domestic abuse relationships and its impact on help-seeking and justice

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Abstract:

This paper describes the experiences of 10 victims-survivors in the United Kingdom whose abusive partners coerced them into unwanted sex with third parties, or attempted to do so. In some cases, this took place in the context of prostitution, in other cases not. This paper discusses these victims'-survivors' experiences of unwanted sex with third parties as an element of their wider abusive relationships, and how this form of violence/abuse affected their experiences seeking and obtaining help and justice. Unwanted sex with third parties is a potential element of abuse by intimate partners that should be identified and addressed together with other harms experienced by victims-survivors.

Key words:

domestic violence and abuse; sexual exploitation; prostitution; help-seeking; justice

Key messages:

- An under-recognised element of some domestic abuse relationships is the abuser coercing their partner into unwanted sex with third parties, both within and outside of prostitution;
- Unwanted sex with third parties can add barriers to seeking and obtaining help and justice, in addition to those already present for domestic and sexual violence/abuse.

Introduction

This paper discusses the experiences of ten victims-survivors¹ in the United Kingdom (UK) whose abusive partners subjected them to actual or attempted unwanted sex with third parties. It focuses on how this form of violence/abuse manifested for them, and how it affected their seeking and obtaining help and justice.

For all ten victim-survivors – nine women and one man – the perpetrator who coerced or attempted to coerce them into unwanted sex with others was an abusive, male intimate partner (and in one case, also the victim's-survivor's father when she was a child). In some cases, the unwanted sex with others occurred in the context of prostitution, and in other cases there was no indication that money or anything material was received by the perpetrator from those whose access to the victim-survivor he facilitated. While there is significant discussion in academic and non-academic literature on prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation of the involvement of intimate partners as pimps or traffickers, there is little discussion of unwanted sex with third parties within the context of domestic violence/abuse (DVA) relationships, and including outside of prostitution/trafficking. This paper aims, first, to further our knowledge on unwanted sex with others as a potential element of DVA. Second, it aims to highlight some barriers to seeking and obtaining help and justice that arise from, or are closely linked to, the element of unwanted sex with others, beyond barriers already faced by victims-survivors of DVA and sexual violence.

Before discussing these victims'-survivors' experiences, the following section outlines some of the literature on unwanted sex with others within the contexts of prostitution and DVA. This is followed by an overview of barriers to seeking and obtaining help and justice in relation to DVA, sexual violence and sexual exploitation.

Unwanted sex with third parties

The literature on prostitution makes significant mention of male intimate partners, or men posing as intimate partners, coercing or exploiting victims – particularly women and girls – in(to) prostitution (see e.g. Raphael, 2012; Hickie and Roe-Sepowitz, 2017; Reid, 2014; Stark and Hodgson, 2004; Williamson and Cluse, 2002; Jayasree, 2004; Karandikar and Próspero, 2010; Karandikar, et al., 2011; Panchanadeswaran, et al., 2008; Silverman, et al., 2007; Kennedy, et al., 2007; Verhoeven, et al., 2015)². This includes in the UK – the setting of the research presented in this paper – particularly in the context of street prostitution (Hester and Westmarland, 2004; Kinnell, 2008; Harding and Hamilton, 2009; Sandwith, 2011) but also in relation to indoor, e.g. brothel and escort, prostitution (APPG, 2018). In line with this, for

the victim-survivors discussed in this paper who were exploited (or an attempt was made to exploit them) by abusive partners in prostitution, this was in both street-based and indoor (escorting) prostitution³.

While intimate partners, or individuals posing as such, pressuring their partners into selling sex is widely discussed within the prostitution literature, there is little discussion of this within literature on DVA. Nor does the DVA literature make much mention of individuals being coerced or pressured by abusive partners to have unwanted sex with others outside the context of prostitution. This is perhaps not surprising given lack of recognition by policy, agencies and practitioners of sexual violence in general within DVA relationships, relative to physical violence (Hester and Lilley, 2017; Westmarland, 2015). Westmarland (2015), in discussing various forms of sexual violence by partners, briefly mentions this as including a partner 'pressurizing or forcing someone to have group sex' and 'pressurizing or forcing someone to sell sex for money or other benefit (pimping)' (30). All ten victim-survivors discussed in this paper experienced unwanted sex with others within a DVA relationship, and discussed it in their interviews for our study in this context. Their testimonies therefore add to knowledge on a type of violence/abuse which can be part of some DVA relationships, examined here not from the angle of prostitution or trafficking, but as part of wider abusive relationships, both when the unwanted sex with others is paid and unpaid.

Barriers to seeking and obtaining help and justice

Myriad barriers exist to victims-survivors of DVA and/or sexual violence seeking or obtaining help and justice, both formal (e.g. police, courts, health services) and informal (e.g. telling friends or family, directly seeking an apology from the perpetrator, being believed). These include, for example, lack of knowledge about what resources exist or how to access them, fear of retaliation by the perpetrator, fear of not being believed or assisted, feelings of shame or guilt, fear of losing children or housing, not feeling ready to end the relationship, and many other reasons (see e.g. Fugate, et al., 2005; Sable, et al., 2006). Intersections such as gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, class, disability, immigration status and living in a rural vs urban context, can present additional barriers (see e.g. Huntley, et al., 2019; Lichtenstein and Johnson, 2009; Sable, et al., 2006; Pendleton, 2003; Keilty and Connelly, 2001). The victim-survivors discussed here noted many of these barriers to seeking help or justice in relation to DVA and sexual violence generally. However, they also faced some barriers specific to the unwanted sex with others element of their abuse. Some of these echo what has been found in relation to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

Victims of trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation – who are forced to have sex with third parties for the financial gain of their exploiters – can be reluctant to seek help or justice against their perpetrators. Some of the reasons are general to gender-based violence broadly, including fear of repercussions from the perpetrator(s), trauma, feeling shame, fear of not being believed, and language barriers if they are not proficient in the local language. However, some are specific to being sexually exploited, including fear of criminalisation (in particular for engaging in prostitution), fear of being deported (if they are foreign nationals) for having committed prostitution-related offences (Walby, et al., 2016; Hoyle, et al., 2011; Annison, 2013; Kelly and Regan, 2000; Renzetti, et al., 2015; N Westmarland, 2006), and lack of access

to DVA refugees if suffering from drug addiction and/or due to being involved in prostitution (Hester and Westmarland, 2004).

Looking at the links between trafficking for sexual exploitation and DVA, Verhoeven, et al. (2015) argue that where victims are in intimate, abusive relationships with their traffickers, the combination of DVA and trafficking creates additional barriers on top of those already present for victims of sexual exploitation. Having the emotional attachment of an intimate relationship can cause victims to accept perpetrators' behaviour, and to be more reluctant to report them or assist in criminal proceedings against them. They also may not recognise the perpetrator's control over or exploitation of their prostitution. For example, they assume that the partner checking on them constantly while they are selling sex is a normal part of their relationship, or that giving their earnings to the perpetrator is not problematic because they are in a relationship where 'everything is shared'. Victims may also not acknowledge or want to deal with problems related to their selling sex because they want to continue earning money, whether to become independent, support their family or for other reasons (Verhoeven, et al., 2015).

Compounding these barriers can be practitioners not identifying victims of sexual exploitation. Police sometimes view victims as perpetrators, for example if they are in the country illegally or if selling sex is criminalised in their jurisdiction. Practitioners generally may not see victims as 'worthy' of assistance if they have not experienced physical violence or overt coercion, if they have returned to their traffickers after being assisted, or if they are viewed as just 'sex workers' who have made a choice to be in prostitution (L Westmarland, 2009; Hoyle, et al., 2011; Farrell, et al., 2015; Jones and Kingshott, 2016). Thus, sometimes police and other practitioners' lack of understanding of the issues (Annison, 2013; Kelly and Regan, 2000) can mean that victims are not supported adequately and in a way that would assist their disclosure and cooperation with the criminal justice system, or to victims not being identified in the first place. Some of these barriers were noted by the victims-survivors discussed here. This includes some of those who were subjected to unwanted sex with others outside of trafficking/prostitution, as well. They also discussed some additional barriers.

Methods and sample

The victims-survivors discussed in this paper were interviewed for a wider research project titled 'Justice, Inequalities and Gender-based Violence', carried out between 2016-18 and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The project looked at how 'justice' is understood, sought and experienced by victims-survivors of various forms of gender-based violence in the UK – including DVA, sexual violence, so-called 'honour-based' violence and sexual harassment – and how these experiences might be influenced by inequalities related to gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability and income. The project conceptualised justice widely, to include the criminal justice system but also other forms of justice outside of it. Ethics clearance was obtained from the University of Bristol. In addition to an extensive literature review (Mulvihill, et al., 2018) and an analysis of police data on rape and DVA cases (Lilley-Walker, et al., 2018), the research included interviews with 251 victim-survivors and over 40 practitioners.

During the interviews, before being asked to elaborate on their experiences, victims-survivors were presented with a list of various forms of gender-based violence, and asked to affirm whether or not they had experienced each. We made it clear that they would not be required to talk about these experiences if they did not want to. This meant that participants could answer 'yes' or 'no' without fear of having to go into detail about experiences they might not want to discuss. Interviewers listed the forms of abuse and if a participant seemed unsure whether they had experienced that form of abuse, the interviewer explained, elaborated and gave examples. One of the questions we asked was whether they had experienced actual or attempted 'unwanted sex with others', which referred to a perpetrator coercing or attempting to coerce them into sexual acts with third parties. We included this question because our advisory group of survivors, who helped us develop the interview questions, emphasised this as a type of violence/abuse to ask about. In total, 23 of the 251 victim-survivor participants affirmed that they had experienced actual or attempted unwanted sex with others. Ten of these victim-survivors discussed their experiences at some length, and this paper is based on their testimonies. Six discussed actual unwanted sex with third parties taking place, and four discussed attempts to coerce them into unwanted sex with others. They consisted of nine women and one man. The nine women identified as heterosexual, the man identified as gay. All were British nationals.

The ten interviews were semi-structured, individual interviews conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone. Participants were provided with a participant information sheet and consent form prior to the interviews, which detailed how their data would be used and stored, and confirmed that they could withdraw their participation and data from the research at any time. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (if the participant consented to this), and thematically analysed with the aid of qualitative analysis software NVivo. For all interviews in the study, coding sheets were populated in Microsoft Word by the research team, summarising information from the interviews and noting direct quotes from the participants, for various themes related to seeking help and justice. These ten participants' full interview transcripts and coding sheets were re-examined for the analysis presented in this paper, focusing on what they described in relation to two themes: 1) their experiences of actual or attempted unwanted sex with third parties; and 2) their experiences of seeking help and justice, as they relate to the unwanted sex with third parties as distinct from other forms of gender-based violence they experienced. All names have been changed.

Participants' experiences of unwanted sex with third parties

All ten victim-survivors who discussed unwanted sex with others, actual or attempted, reported being coerced or pressured by abusive male partners. In six cases, the actual or attempted unwanted sex with others does not appear to have been in exchange for anything material, i.e. neither the perpetrator nor victim-survivor appear to have received anything, whether money, drugs, or something else. This does not necessarily mean that nothing was exchanged, but these participants did not mention any form of payment or organised prostitution during their interview. In four cases, participants made clear that the actual or attempted unwanted sex with others was within the context of prostitution, for money.

Emma, for example, was in an abusive, very violent relationship with a member of a bike gang from her early 20s. This partner became her pimp, exploiting her in street prostitution, thereby coercing her into unwanted sex with others on a regular basis. Nicola was also in a physically, sexually and emotionally abusive and violent relationship with a man who was also a member of a gang, who also forced her into prostitution.

Seema experienced controlling behaviour, emotional abuse and sexual violence from her husband. He also sold her for sex to other men:

He used to take horrid pictures of everything down below. It got to the point where he used to post stuff on an escort website, post pictures of me ... not my face ... as a way of creating more income. So um there was pictures of me on ... I don't know what website, I don't know what it was called, but there was pictures of me on there, and men had to pay to get their kicks, and he would get that money. (...) Made me have a threesome, just yeah ... got me drunk ... I don't know if he'd given me anything, but yeah to force me to do things that I didn't want to. (...) And ... yeah just horrible (...)

In a case of attempted coerced sex with third parties, Katherine had met a man online and they began a sexual relationship. He gradually became more controlling, and eventually tried to persuade her to take part in street prostitution, as well as pornography.

In these four cases, the unwanted sex with third parties, actual or attempted, was or would have been in the context of prostitution, both street and indoor, and in one case, also pornography. As indicated earlier, in the remaining six cases, participants did not discuss anything having been exchanged for the unwanted sex.

Lisa, for example, was in a violent and abusive relationship for seven years. Her partner forced her to have sex with other men, while she was pregnant. She was able to negotiate for this particular form of abuse to stop, in exchange for his other demands, including her isolation:

He was very controlling, very sexually abusive. (...) he was very demanding, didn't want me to work, didn't want me to go to college, controlled the finances. And he wanted me to have sex with other men in front of him while I was pregnant. (...) Then it kind of stopped for a while, kind of got better (...) because I just kind of agreed to his terms. I made a condition of I would not agree to the forced to have sex with other men, I would stay with him. But (...) I had to agree to no college, no friends, no work, basically stay in the house.

Although the focus of this paper is on DVA relationships, the childhood experiences described by one participant, Jane, are particularly relevant to her experiences as an adult. As a child, Jane was forced to have sex with other men by her father, who himself also abused her:

Sexual violence started at the age of 4 and it was at that stage a neighbour and his son were involved. And then a father from about four doors up, he raped me at the age of 4. So that abuse kind of happened until we moved at age, at age 7 we then suddenly moved (...) I'm not sure whether we were purposely moved there or whether it was just by chance, I really don't know, but there was a paedophile that lived next door, and he was part of a paedophile group. (...) And I was first raped by him pretty much as soon

as we had moved in (...) it was a group of five of them, and that went on for 4 years, 5 years until I was 12. (...) a couple of months after that we moved again. And for a while from about 12 to 14 it was just the abuse at home with my dad, and then from age 14 he started introducing other men into the sexual abuse again.

The abuse continued for Jane, and led her to attempt suicide at age 17:

And at age 17, it was just after one rape (...) he had told my mum to take me to this house. (...) So I was taken to this house, and it was just after that incident where I think it kind of just sunk in for me that this is – all life was going to be like, you know, there was no escape from this, and it was that night that (...) I took an overdose and attempted suicide ... which was unsuccessful. (...) and I still look back at that and kind of regret not dying that day.

When Jane was 18 years old, her parents forced her to marry a man who physically, sexually and emotionally abused her. In addition to this, he also facilitated her rape by other men:

...he had involved five other men in the domestic violence, there was a lot of sexual violence around that, a lot of rape.

He used their children as a tool for coercion and control in the abuse by other men:

... he would threaten me that if I didn't ... so particularly when all these other men were involved and stuff, that a lot of that violence was 'if you don't do this, I will harm the children' so you know my compliance was completely guaranteed because I thought in a warped way that I was protecting my kids, that as long as I did what he wanted me to do, or if I allowed him to do whatever he wanted to do, that I was protecting my girls.

Jane, whose thinking was fully understandable, later found out that her partner had nonetheless abused her daughters.

The male victim-survivor of the group, James, was in a same-sex, abusive relationship. His partner coerced him into sex with others on two occasions, using the threat of ending the relationship if he did not comply:

During our relationship on two separate occasions he made me have a threesome, one with his ex partner who was HIV positive, and one with a random stranger that we met online. And if I didn't go ahead with it then he was going to finish the relationship. And I was just like ... it felt like I had no option but to do it.

In addition to these cases where the unwanted sex took place, three participants – beyond Katherine above whose partner tried to force her into prostitution and pornography – described how their abusive partners tried to pressure them to have sex with third parties, outside the context of commercial sexual exploitation. Sarah's abusive partner, for example, repeatedly tried to pressure her to have sex with other men:

Tried to force that. He wanted men to queue up and have sex with me.

He tried to normalise the idea, before asking her more directly:

(...) and he started to say ... when we were having sex and things like 'How would it feel now if you were having sex with the window cleaner and I wanted to watch and film' – it was very strange, because he almost wanted to create a sense of normality and then he would introduce this fantasy. (...) So I'd have all of that for a couple of weeks then he'd try and introduce it into our life. (...) Then he was talking about these clubs where women lay there and men queue up and have sex with them, and they're tapping each other on the shoulder. And then I would have that then where he was trying to get me to commit to doing that.

These victim-survivors all experienced actual or attempted unwanted sex with third parties within the context of otherwise abusive relationships. In some of these cases, something was or would have been exchanged for the unwanted sex, namely money in the context of street or indoor/online prostitution, and in one case, also pornography. In other cases there was no indication in the interviews that anything was exchanged; however, it is possible that this did happen. Furthermore, even if nothing material was exchanged, the perpetrator likely still received some benefit, for example favour with the men for whom he had provided sexual access to the victim-survivor.

Barriers to seeking and obtaining help and justice

These victim-survivors – just as the other participants in the wider study – had broad understandings of what they perceived as justice. Justice could be through more formal routes, such as obtaining a conviction against the perpetrator through a criminal court, or informal, such as the perpetrator acknowledging the harm they had caused or simply being believed by friends and family. They primarily discussed their experiences of seeking help and justice in relation to their broader domestic abusive relationships, noting many of the barriers described earlier such as fear of repercussions from the perpetrator, not being believed and so forth. However, several of the barriers they experienced are directly or closely linked to the unwanted sex with others they experienced within these relationships.

One such barrier was trauma arising from the unwanted sex with others. Some victim-survivors furthermore simply wanted to move on from this trauma, rather than report to the police or press charges. This was the case for Nicola:

Yeah, yeah, [the police] was very helpful, but the thing is like when you've been through that kind of traumatic event you know I'll be honest, I didn't press charges. All I wanted was my life. Do you know what I mean? Cos after what I went through you know I was forced into prostitution, which is something that like I don't really like talking about you know.

While trauma prevented Nicola from pursuing formal justice, it prevented Jane from obtaining it once she had begun engaging with the process. Jane had suffered years of violent abuse and rape not only from her father and husband, but also third parties. When criminal

investigations were launched against her husband and some of the men he had facilitated to rape her, due to the trauma she had experienced she was not able to continue with the process. The difficulty of engaging in an investigation after all she had gone through was exacerbated by the fact that, as her husband had subjected her to abuse by numerous other individuals, there were multiple perpetrators to deal with. Furthermore, he had moved her around on a regular basis; as such, the abuse, which took place on various occasions, and also in several locations. As a result, there were multiple police forces from different regions involved. Soon, Jane was again attempting to take her own life, as she had done as a teenager:

(...) eventually there were going to be nine forces involved and they wanted each of those nine forces to investigate it. So it ended up where at one time I had 18 police officers all individually investigating and contacting me and wanting me to give statements, and I couldn't handle it ... and so there was another suicide attempt.

At that stage, the officer coordinating Jane's cases halted most of them out of concern for her mental health. The trauma that Jane had experienced, including from being subjected to unwanted sex with others, as well as the fact that there were several perpetrators and locations due to the nature of the abuse, meant that ultimately, Jane was not able to obtain justice through the criminal justice system.

In addition to the trauma arising from unwanted sex with others, and the issue of multiple perpetrators, another barrier discussed by several victim-survivors was initially not recognising what was happening to them as abuse. For some, they had experienced abuse before, which had either led them to believe it was normal, and/or to resign themselves to it. Jane noted:

(...) you know you're so conditioned into that way of life that ... and I think that's why I never particularly looked to get out of it, because it was just ... it's all I've known.

Another barrier to some of these victim-survivors seeking or obtaining help or justice was a lack of understanding among practitioners about prostitution and unwanted sex with third parties. Emma, for example, whose abusive partner forced her into street prostitution, encountered police who lacked adequate understanding of women involved in prostitution and suffering from drug misuse, causing them to not respond adequately, and indeed to see her as the problem:

So no one talked to me about it, no. No one ... the police didn't really talk to me about any of it. Cos am I going to make a statement, am I going to press charges, are they going to be able to get a prosecution - if not, they're going to arrest me. (...) On a warrant, yeah. Because I was already involved in a chaotic lifestyle.

There were points in Emma's case where police should have assisted her, but instead arrested her for prostitution-related offences:

Emma: So the police were involved in the one time that he tried to kill me – I ran away and ran through the streets half naked.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Emma: And then I was too scared to do anything.

Interviewer: Okay. So did the police talk to you at that point?

Emma: No (...), they arrested me on a warrant, because I didn't want to make a statement.

Emma had thus been suffering from abuse – unwanted sex with third parties through prostitution, in addition to DVA – but police's lack of understanding of the situation meant she was not able to get help when she needed it.

For some, a lack of understanding by professionals of this form of abuse also resulted in a lack of acknowledgement of the violence/abuse that was taking place. This was in itself a barrier to justice, if justice is perceived to be, even if in part, a simple acknowledgement of the harm suffered – something expressed by some of these victim-survivors. Lisa, during a fact-finding trial in a family court involving her abusive partner, had to discuss the men he had forced her to have sex with. The judge implied that she should have been grateful because one of them was a younger man:

And like ridiculous things are said to you ... like you know one guy that my husband forced me to have sex with was 28 and there was comment that I should have been grateful you know (...) In the court ... by the judge, like 'Oh he was quite young and quite nice' or something 'wasn't he, and he was nicer to you than your husband' – because my husband was older than me.

Instead of acknowledging the harm caused to Lisa by her husband and the man he forced her to have sex with, which could have gone some way to provide her with a sense of justice, the judge trivialised the abuse, thereby denying Lisa that justice.

Finally, another barrier for some was substance misuse which had resulted from being forced into prostitution, as in Emma's case:

I had substance misuse issues, so none of the refuges [DVA shelters], no one would help me, no one would take me – I was literally running away to friends. And then he would woo my friends and my friends would tell him where I was.

The substance misuse issues arising from Emma's partner forcing her into prostitution and unwanted sex with others thus made it difficult for her to access services, including DVA refuges, where she could have received help in relation to the sexual exploitation and the wider DVA relationship.

Discussion

Although unwanted sex with third parties is more recognised in relation to prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation, this form of abuse is not often discussed from the angle of DVA. Both literature and practice often divide gender-based violence into DVA, sexual violence and other forms of violence as separate experiences. However, these interviews show how complex DVA can be and how it can provide context for other abuses. All ten of the victims-survivors in this paper were coerced – or an attempt was made to coerce them – into unwanted sex with others by abusive intimate partners (and in Jane's case, also her father when she was a child). The fact that the victims-survivors who helped us develop our interview questions emphasised this as a form of violence/abuse that needs to be included

also signals that it is not uncommon. Victims-survivors would benefit if police, court practitioners, service providers and others coming into contact with victims-survivors of DVA are aware of unwanted sex with others as a possible element of abusive relationships, and seek to identify and address it. It may not be something that victim-survivors think to disclose: many of our participants – understandably – had to first reflect on their experiences before answering ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question of whether they had experienced unwanted sex with others. This shows how, as is the case with other forms of violence/abuse, it may not have been recognised as such until they were asked about it specifically (see also Harding and Hamilton, 2009).

These experiences of unwanted sex with third parties presented additional barriers to seeking and obtaining help and justice, beyond the numerous barriers that already exist to seeking help or justice in relation to DVA and sexual violence generally. This includes trauma linked to the unwanted sex with others; the fact that there are multiple perpetrators due to the nature of the abuse; not recognising the unwanted sex with others as abuse or resigning oneself to it; police, courts and other agencies and practitioners not recognising the unwanted sex with others as abuse and the victim-survivors as individuals in need of help and deserving justice; and drug misuse and the lack of stability that can be linked to particularly street prostitution. These have been documented previously in relation to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. However, some – such as the issue of multiple perpetrators and a lack of understanding among practitioners of the harm caused by unwanted sex with others – were also present for those who were not trafficked or exploited in prostitution, such as Jane and Lisa. As such, they merit more attention as possible barriers faced by victims-survivors in DVA relationships generally, whether or not these relationships involve commercial sexual exploitation.

The lack of understanding by police and other practitioners of the situation of some individuals involved in prostitution being a barrier to formal justice, was also underscored by analysis of police data in the larger research project of which these interviews were a part. Analysis of sexual violence cases reported to the police found that cases where the victim was identified as being involved in prostitution were the least likely to progress through the criminal justice system (Lilley-Walker, et al., 2018).

In terms of policy, DVA, sexual violence and sexual exploitation laws and policies, while remaining distinct, can show the overlap that can exist for some victims-survivors of unwanted sex with others. As an example, Australia’s National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (New South Wales, 2012), in listing elements that can be part of DVA, includes ‘enforced prostitution, and being made to have sex with friends of the perpetrator’ (6). Such inclusion can increase awareness and recognition of this form of violence/abuse, which can, in turn, help to increase victims’-survivors’ access to help and justice.

Regarding services, the overlap in such cases of sexual violence and DVA underscores the importance of Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advisors (IDSVAs), who can address these different types of violence/abuse experienced by some victims-survivors concurrently. This includes in services working with individuals involved in prostitution, due to the overlap that can exist between DVA and pimping (Hester and Westmarland, 2004).

Finally, the victim-survivors who were forced into prostitution were clearly not consenting to sex with the men who paid for sexual access to them: Emma was suffering from drug addiction, while Seema's husband got her drunk when he arranged for men over through an escorting website. In England and Wales, it is a crime to pay (or attempt to pay) for sex with a person in prostitution who is being coerced or exploited by a third party, and the victim being drunk is recognised as undermining consent (section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003). The numerous men who paid for sexual access to these victim-survivors would fall under this offence.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to increase awareness of unwanted sex with others, as an additional form of violence/abuse employed by some perpetrators in DVA relationships. Victims-survivors would benefit from greater awareness and understanding by practitioners of this type of violence and abuse. As an under-researched area, particularly within studies on DVA and outside the context of prostitution, unwanted sex with third parties warrants further investigation, including from the perspective of those who have sex with women and men whose partners are facilitating that sexual access.

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Notes

¹ Those who have experienced gender-based violence and other abuses vary in whether they see themselves as 'victims' or 'survivors'. Our project, and this paper, therefore uses 'victim-survivor' to denote an 'and/or' relationship to the terms.

² Several studies also discuss women (and men, see e.g. George, et al., 2016) in prostitution experiencing DVA, but not the abusive partner coercing the woman into prostitution or exploiting her in it, rather how the DVA affects the victim's-survivor's ability to negotiate condom use and their risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections such as HIV (see e.g. Erickson, et al., 2017; Wilson, et al., 2016).

³ Some (e.g. Kinnell, 2008; Sanders, O'Neill and Pitcher, 2009; Harding and Hamilton, 2009) argue that, in the UK, the intimate relationships of most women in prostitution are not necessarily as exploitative as the traditional 'pimp-worker' relationship. They call into question the dominance of boyfriend/pimps as a route into prostitution for young women in the UK, arguing that other factors such as poverty and drug use may play a stronger role.

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